

ANA Inspiration

Tuesday, September 8, 2020

Rancho Mirage, California, USA

Mission Hills Country Club

Lydia Ko

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome inside the virtual media center here at the ANA Inspiration. I am pleased to be here with the 2016 ANA Inspiration champion and 15-time LPGA winner Lydia Ko. How are you doing out there?

LYDIA KO: You know, considering it was meant to be like 45 degrees Celsius yesterday and then something like a little lower today. I've never been in 45 degrees, so it was kind of frightening at first because I already know 35 is really hot already, so I'm like 10 degrees, I'm pretty sure that's a huge difference. Fortunately for us with the smoke I think it was a little better temperature-wise. Obviously it's not what we want, to have smoke, but it's definitely nice to be out here.

I think at some points in this year, we all were pretty worried that we wouldn't be able to come over here, and obviously this is a tournament with a lot of history, so we're excited to play our second major of this year.

THE MODERATOR: We were talking about earlier, Celsius, by the way, you'll see temperatures up in the 100s here. When you first heard of this tournament moving to September. What were some of the first things you thought of, and were you preparing kind of a little bit ago for the heat that was going to be coming this week?

LYDIA KO: I think I was just excited that we were going to have the opportunity to play. I actually at that point when the schedule was kind of announced didn't realize how hot it would be until I think a couple weeks ago I was talking with Pernilla and she was saying that it would be pretty hot because I was initially thinking of coming early the week before instead of going back to the East Coast.

I saw the temperature and I was like -- I normally think like 70s is perfect, 80s is like nice, 90s it's getting hot and 100 you're like, whoa, and then I'm like, this is like three digits and it's over 110. Like you don't really know how to gauge it, especially in Fahrenheit, I'm not like super good with.

But no, I mean, everybody is playing in the same weather, and like I said, we're just lucky to be here, obviously a very

different atmosphere to what it's normally like. But at least the champion will be able to have a nice dive into the cool water of Poppies Pond on Sunday.

THE MODERATOR: You've had a string of some good performances since returning to play. After five weeks in a row, was it nice to kind of have that rest, or are you one of those people that you could have kept on going?

LYDIA KO: I feel like I could have kept playing, but sometimes -- like mentally you feel like you're good and you feel like you could play forever, but physically you know that you're getting a little bit of fatigue, especially traveling internationally for the first time in pretty much half a year.

No, I think at least the adrenaline of being excited to come back and play again, you kind of forget about like where your physical state is, but definitely after Arkansas I was ready to go back and sleep in my own bed and get some break. I've never felt like this off week had gone by so quick. I said, okay, I'm going to take three days off, start practicing on Thursday, but the week just goes by so quick, so I said it's not an off week when there's just one; there needs to be like two, three.

THE MODERATOR: For you you'd rather have a longer off week than just one before tournaments. Was this different because this week was a break leading into a major?

LYDIA KO: You know, I think normally I play the Kia Classic prior to this week, so I'm coming in with some sort of momentum, but everyone knows in Orlando, it's so hot there, as well, so I think I'm trying to spend more time on the golf course, and I think that's where I need to personally spend more time with my game just to see the holes because you might be hitting it great on the driving range but that's not what it all is about. Trying to put that on the golf course, and I think you're able to see what's working well, what are the aspects that you need to work on.

I think spending a lot of time on the course, and I think that's the same case here this week. It's pretty hot, so grinding it out on the practice range is not going to be as ideal as maybe some of the other events.

THE MODERATOR: You really have to prioritize with this

ASAP . . . when all is said, we're done.®
sports

heat and see what works for you and how you have to adapt to it. You're a past champion of this event. This I'm guessing has a special place in your heart. What was it like to be able to take the trip to Palm Springs this year knowing if it wasn't in the same week in April that they were still able to have this historic tournament?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I think Mission Hills normally does an incredible job of hosting us here. The course is definitely different with just being at this time of the year, like the grass is different to what we normally play. Most of it I think is Bermuda right now, which is closer to the grass in Florida. But you know, when I come to Palm Springs I always go to a shabu shabu place which is like 20 minutes away, so I'm gutted that I can't go this year. That's like the only downside. But I think overall we're just excited to be here, and what is it, the 74th --

THE MODERATOR: It's something up there.

LYDIA KO: Yeah, it's been a while, so it's a place with a lot of history and you can see by all the signs by the putting green, as well. It's cool to be part of that history for me, and always nice to come back to a place where you've played well and it just draws back a lot of good memories.

THE MODERATOR: There's obviously some big changes this year to not only the course but dealing with the heat. What are some of the strategies that you and your caddie this week have been kind of working on to be able to beat the heat but also take on some of the new changes to this course? I think Jason is back on your bag this week; am I right?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, Jason has been helping me out in the last few events, so nice to come back here with him, and obviously we've got a lot of good memories here together. I think the LPGA has been super generous allowing the caddies to be able to use the golf carts during tournament days, and for both players and caddies to be able to use it in practice rounds, especially when it's super hot. Being healthy is the number one thing, so for them to allow us to do that, I think it just gives us an opportunity to maybe spend some more time out here and check out the golf course where walking definitely would be a grind.

I think there's some changes, and I think with the grass being Bermuda, there's not as much run as I've seen in the past years, so just playing around with that. But since last year I think they've tightened up the golf course, so just keeping it on the fairways is going to be key to give yourself good looks for birdies and at some points pars, as well.

THE MODERATOR: Is it weird looking out on No. 18 and

not seeing the big grandstands?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, they have the signature blue grandstand behind the palm trees, the middle of the green, behind the 18th. It's weird not seeing them, but I think for the last few weeks we haven't seen grandstands, so almost I think when we see grandstands it's going to be like, whoa, what is this? It'll feel like a stadium kind of a feel.

Obviously we love the fans here. Walking down that signature walk on 18 and high-fiving people. Hopefully it's something that will be -- hopefully we'll all be together for next year, but it is something that we're getting used to, but it doesn't -- almost I think we're used to not seeing it, that you're not like, I'm purposely searching for it.

Q. When you won this event in 2016, you were young and it was your second major. Were you able to fully appreciate the significance of not just winning this major but doing so in the fashion that you did, and when you look back on it now, is it more or less significant to you that you won the way you did?

LYDIA KO: I think having won the Evian Championship prior, I was able to -- I think I was able to soak it in a little bit more, where Evian I was like -- it was obviously something that I'd always dreamed about, but when that moment comes, you don't expect it at the same time.

For me going down the last, I felt like I needed to make an eagle to maybe be in a playoff because I had only seen the scores from when the group behind had finished 15, so for me I didn't really know what I needed to do, apart from try and maybe make an eagle, and I knew that I tried to be aggressive, but Jason kind of pulled me off and said, hey, we can lay up and make a birdie from there. And I think I was like, but I think I need to make eagle, so it's something that I really thank him, even to this day. I think if he wasn't there and I was out there just by myself, I would have definitely hit a 3-wood, and that's definitely a pretty tough green to hit with a 3-wood coming in.

Ended up being the right play, and you always just see so many people jump into Poppies Pond in so many different ways, and for me when I knew it was like my turn, it's almost like -- there's so many emotions and so many things you kind of think about, but yeah, I think I give a lot of credits to Jason for really the 18th hole, which I think was the one that kind of put that statement for me to be able to win. But he and I were just talking about it yesterday. He said I actually holed a lot of good par putts down the whole back nine, and I think all those opportunities kind of gave me the final opportunity on the last hole. Yeah, it was a very memorable day.

Q. I was speaking to Sean last week about your golf game, and he was telling me how far you're flying the driver, and I almost accused him of perpetuating fake news. How is your game different now? It seems like you're bombing it.

LYDIA KO: I mean, I don't know if I'm bombing it. Ariya Jutanugarn is bombing it.

No, I think I got asked this question by Jerry Foltz at marathon, and he was like, what are the keys, and I said, you talk to the trainer, they say it's him. You talk to the coach, they say it's him. You talk to my mom and she'll say it's the food she's cooking up for me. And then Jason is like, no, just say it's you.

But I think it's really a combination of things. I think Sean and I have just been trying to work to a place where I'm thinking less and I'm out there and I'm hitting it aggressively, and I feel like these last five events, the more aggressively I've hit it without trying to control where the ball is going, I think the better I've been hitting it.

I think the more competitive rounds I get to play, the more comfortable I am just going out there and not worrying about it and just hitting it. I think just being free is a big key for me, so that's what we've been working on.

I think it's just a great combination of things. PXG has definitely helped me with their new driver that came out, as well. Yeah, it's nice that -- I think the more I get to play and the more like good shots I hit, it just builds confidence for me. How close do you feel you are and with your game in terms of really contending? You've come back from COVID and you've been in contention in just about every event you've played. That must give you a lot of confidence. Do you feel your game is right there at the moment?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I feel like I've been moving in the right direction. Definitely when you see better scores, I think the confidence itself just automatically builds. Going back to Marathon, it wasn't the way I had wanted to finish, but that tournament actually gave me a lot of confidence to say, hey, you know, I can be back in contention, and I think the more times you put yourself in contention, when time goes by, you're going to just be the one holding the trophy in the end.

I think it's super important for me to keep playing consistently and putting myself in contention hopefully more often, and I think the more times you're in that position, you become a little bit more and more comfortable in that position, as well.

Yeah, you know, I think obviously sometimes when you're playing better you start putting pressure on yourself because you feel like you're close, but it was something that I was talking to Sean about, you just can't push it, you just have to be patient, and you just have to wait and embrace the moment, and hopefully the more times I'll keep playing consistently, the more times I'll just put myself in those positions and have a good run at it.

Q. Returning to a course where you have won, like the marathon, you had played well there before and had won there, so does that just give you extra confidence?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, it's always nice to come back to a course where you've played well at, just because you always draw back on the good memories. You know that sometimes you were out of position and you were able to make an incredible up and down or that shot on the 18th on the 72nd hole for me, it's a shot I'll probably never forget.

I think the big thing actually around that shot was Jason saying like aim half a yard left or something and then I hit it pretty close to that, so everybody was talking a lot about it. I think really when you come back to a place you've played well at, you're able to kind of learn from some of the past experiences and really get those good vibes.

But the course is definitely playing a little differently to when I won it, so hopefully I'll play well on the course setup that's set up for us here this year.

Q. I want to talk to you about the heat a little bit. If you can give us just some details in terms of how many bottles of water you're drinking or how hot it is in your car? How hot is it?

LYDIA KO: It's pretty hot. It's very hot. It's hot that you touch like the door handle of your car and it's kind of on the slight sizzling point. I think you can not drink almost like too much water. It's pretty dry heat, so you definitely need to stay hydrated.

Yeah, it's very different to Orlando heat, where Orlando I feel like might be lower temperature but it's very humid, so I always say it's like going to a complimentary sauna, whereas here it's just more stronger sun, like the desert, very dry. I think I landed on Sunday and I got some food to go on the way here, and I kind of sat on the curbside and ate, and I felt like I was in a sauna eating super hot food, so it was like as if you were being beat on.

And the wind blows, normally you kind of feel like an ocean cooler breeze, but the wind felt like when you went into

your car when it was super hot and the first thing you turn on your air-conditioning but the warm heater heat comes on, so it feels like that.

But I honestly think I prefer dryer, a little hotter temperature here than the slightly lower and more humid weather in Orlando, so to me this is great compared to what I had last week at home.

Q. If I could just ask, your practice, are you doing any less than normal because of the heat, on the range or whatever? Are you curtailing any of it?

LYDIA KO: I played 18 yesterday, and I played nine and then took the cart around. Obviously with having the cart it's nice because you can just go out there to each green and do a couple chips. But I think I am spending less time like grinding on the practice facilities and actually spending more time on the golf course, which I think at tournaments anyway, you're just trying to get a good feel of the course and your practice really should be prior to that week.

But yeah, no, I'm just -- I think I spent a little bit more time on the golf course and just getting a good feel of how the course is playing rather than spending a lot of time on the practice facilities, which is kind of like the British Open where you try and not hit so many balls on the driving range because there's not that many normal shots when you're out there playing.

Q. You mention Jason and how key he was in your victory here, and now you're back together again. What is it about him that you appreciate the most in terms of how he caddies?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I mean, he's only helping me out for a few more weeks until I think his player is coming back. Unsure when. But yeah, it's definitely nice for him to be there. I think he and I have one of the best like chemistry together, even when we were working, and then even when we came back, sometimes when you have -- stop working together, sometimes I feel like there could be a little bit of awkwardness, but I saw him the first week at Inverness, and I felt like there was none of that weird feeling and we were able to get there, close. Maybe because he's Australian and I'm Kiwi, we're quite close that I know we're able to kind of get along straightaway.

He and I share a lot of great memories together, and he and I worked for a pretty long time. It's always nice to draw back to some of those memories, and obviously he's a great caddie, as well, and I always enjoy spending time with him.

THE MODERATOR: We've been asking every person that

comes in, if you have the chance to leap again into Poppies Pond for the second time, what kind of jump would you do?

LYDIA KO: Well, I jump like this and then as I was going in the water I held my nose, and that was like 100 percent like subconscious. I had no idea I had done it until somebody else -- they were like, hey, you held your nose going into Poppies Pond, and I was like, no, I didn't, I just did the heart and went in. There's things that you do without realizing you've done it. Hopefully I won't hold my nose because it looks like I'm about to jump into a swimming pool in the backyard rather than going into such a legendary Poppies Pond. Just that. No belly flops.

THE MODERATOR: We had Austin Ernst say she'd do a cannonball.

LYDIA KO: I would leave that up to her. I don't know how good my gymnastics, those kind of skills are, so hopefully a gracious jump and a gracious walk back in.

Q. When it's 120 degrees outside, what does Mama Ko cook?

LYDIA KO: She still cooks delicious Korean food, and I will still have my peanut butter and jam -- PB&J out there on the golf course. Yeah, food to me doesn't change that much. I think a nice blast of cold shower and then back to the Korean food it is.

I think definitely coming from home we were able to pack a few things. Even during these circumstances I think I'm pretty lucky that she's able to be here with me, and I don't have to order food a lot or cook it myself because I might never be leaving the kitchen at that point.

Q. Just a reaction to the very sad news about Charley Hull having to pull out having tested positive for COVID-19. I guess it's just a timely reminder about how you've got to try to be as safe as possible?

LYDIA KO: Yeah, I think the LPGA has done an incredible job, obviously, we're using the CDC guidelines of setting up our protocol, and when we're inside the ropes we have the option to wear the mask or not, but for the caddies or anyone that's touching flags or rakes, I think everyone is doing a great job of sanitizing the hands and just being careful, and the six feet rule. Obviously it's a little bit harder in some cases when you're with your caddie, but I think for most of the players here and everybody involved, I think we're all trying to be as careful as possible.

Sometimes you do everything right and you just get it from somewhere, so hopefully Charley doesn't have too many

symptoms and she'll be recovered soon, but I think that's the most important thing is that even if you get it you're hoping that you're not symptomatic so that your recovery is quicker. But yeah, I think that's the thing with this virus or with anything; you can do your 100 percent and even more, but sometimes you catch it, so you just have to be careful, so I think that's why it's super important, not only for us as a family but for everybody really worldwide just to be safe because I think the better we do this together, the better -- the quicker we're going to get through this.

Hopefully the day where we can do nice hugs and all that comes soon, but I think the better we do this ourselves, we know that the day is going to come soon. New Zealand is the safest place anyway, as of now.

THE MODERATOR: I think that will wrap it up for us here. Thank you again for everyone joining us, and thank you to Lydia.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports